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SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/03/2028  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [BU](#)  
SUBJECT: BULGARIA: MONTENEGRO AND SERBIA SHOULD ENTER SEDM  
TOGETHER

REF: SECSTATE 114399

Classified By: DCM Alex Karagiannis for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Consistent with its position at the last Southeastern Europe Defense Ministerial Coordinating Committee (SEDM-CC) meeting in September, Bulgaria does not support full membership for Montenegro in SEDM without Serbia joining at the same time. In Bulgaria's view, both countries meet the requirements for membership and should be accepted as members. SEDM should be used to draw Serbia into a network of regional cooperation, not to isolate it. Requiring Serbia to reverse its formal opposition to Kosovo's membership in international organizations is "unrealistic" and will simply ensure that Serbia never joins SEDM. While Bulgaria can not support Montenegro's membership in SEDM without Serbia, it did welcome a discussion of the issue at the next SEDM-CC meeting as it is an issue of "utmost importance to the organization." End Summary.

¶2. (C) In a November 3 conversation, Dimiter Zakov, Head of Regional Cooperation within the NATO and International Security Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs told Poloff that Bulgaria opposed offering Montenegro membership without doing the same for Serbia for four reasons: 1) Doing so would leave Serbia as the only NATO Partnership for Peace country in the Balkans outside of SEDM; 2) this exclusion will become essentially permanent since differences between Belgrade and Pristina will not be resolved any time soon; 3) the dangers of isolating Serbia are greater than the risks involved with accepting it into SEDM; 4) Serbia, Romania and Greece are all Bulgaria's neighbors, and Bulgaria must take their views into account. The positions are consistent with what we have heard for some time.

¶3. (C) When challenged on linking Montenegro's membership with Serbia's, Zakov reiterated that Bulgaria did not oppose Montenegro's membership. It supports membership for both countries and opposes exclusion of either. The United States and others, he argued, are wrongly linking Serbia's membership with its political relationship to Kosovo. Zakov noted that the issue was a very important one, and Bulgaria did not object to discussing it more fully at the next SEDM-CC meeting.

¶4. (C) Comment: Bulgaria has long supported SEDM and NATO membership for all Balkan countries. It has recognized Kosovo, but also worked carefully to repair its relations with Serbia, a neighbor and important trade partner. To Bulgaria, SEDM represents a path for Serbia toward EU and

regional integration that is vital to Bulgarian interests; isolation of Serbia must be avoided at all costs. The Bulgaria position on this issue seems quite firm, as Zakov's words reflect comments made at higher levels. Bulgaria has found some cover as Greece and Romania also support Serbia entering with Montenegro. It does not want to be isolated; if Greece and Romania drop their objections Bulgaria would likely follow suit. Our sense is we will need to break all three captials from their comfort zone. For Sofia that will entail making a broader strategic -- not Montenegro-specific -- case.

McEldowney